

**Department Of Health
Health Professions Quality Assurance Division
Washington State
Medical Quality Assurance Commission
Policy Statement**

Title:	Use of Lasers in Skin Care and Treatment	Number: MD2003-03
Reference:		
Contact:	George Heye, MD	
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Supersedes		
Approved		
	Hampton Irwin, MD, Chair	

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulate the sale of lasers¹. Lasers are prescription devices that can be sold only to licensed practitioners with prescriptive authority. Complications from the use of lasers for skin care and treatment include visual impairment, blindness, inflammation, burns, scarring, hypopigmentation and hyperpigmentation.

POLICY

1. The use of a laser to treat or alter the skin is the practice of medicine under RCW 18.71.011.
2. A physician using a laser should be appropriately trained in the physics, safety and techniques of using lasers. Prior to initiating laser treatment, the physician should take a history, perform an appropriate physical examination, make an appropriate diagnosis, recommend appropriate treatment, obtain the patient's informed consent which includes informing the patient that a non-physician may operate the laser, provide instructions for emergency and follow-up care, and prepare an appropriate medical record.
3. A physician who meets the above requirements may delegate a laser procedure to an allied health professional, provided such delegation falls within the allied health professional's scope of practice. A physician making such delegation must prepare a written protocol for the allied health professional to follow in administering the laser treatment.
4. The supervising physician should ensure that the allied health professional has appropriate documented training in the area of basic dermatology and

demonstrable training in the safe and effective use of a laser. The allied health professional may perform specifically designed laser procedures pursuant to the written protocol. The allied health professional may not act independently or exercise independent medical judgment in performing a laser procedure.

As the complexity of a skin condition increases, so should the involvement of a physician in the care of that patient. Procedures which carry unusual or significant risks based on the age of the patient, the diagnosis, or the location on the body, should either not be delegated at all or should be delegated only to allied health professionals whose skills and experience are commensurate with the problem. In some cases, the allied health professional may need significant medical training, such as that possessed by a registered nurse or a physician assistant.

5. The physician should provide appropriate supervision to the allied health professional. This may require that the supervising physician be on site or it may require that the supervising physician be reasonably available in person to deal with complications. This will depend on the facility, the patient, the diagnosis, the person providing the treatment and the nature of the treatment being provided. Reasonable care and safety of the patient, not physician convenience, is the standard.

6. Regardless of who performs the laser treatment, the physician is ultimately responsible for the safety of the patient.

ⁱ The use of the word "laser" in this policy includes pulsed dye devices, intense pulsed light devices and radiofrequency generators.